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## Ontological Quest in the Fictional World of William Golding

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### **Abstract:**

William Golding's authentic fictional craftsmanship attempts to unravel the modern world's predicaments. His visionary eye and a subtle intellect have embarked upon intimately related, yet a variety of panoramic characters who represent every categories of human being in the world. A binary structure runs through his fiction. Each fiction is inevitably marked by the experiences of two protagonists; their journeys through life in uncommon, difficult historical or geographical settings develop along the lines of two different ideologies through which, eventually, the author's philosophical aim shines through. Visionary outbursts of the characters crutch upon the fluctuating symbols and metaphors as conscious expression of metaphysical meaning of 'Being and Becoming' while exploring where is the bridge between the two world of rationality and spirituality, how an individual character unravels the mystery of life and either moves away from or attain to the point of where man and god subsume. The central argument from which this paper unfolds is the author's exploration of the man's mind from superficial consciousness to the most hidden recesses of the unconscious depth.

**Keywords:** Archetype, Ontology, Delphic Oracle, Myth, Trinity

### **Introduction:**

The focus of the paper concerns how Golding's vision of the world and human being is unfolded by quite a few basic techniques that runs through all his fiction as an unifying artistic genius. His settings are distant and fabulous resembling the real world of virtues and vices and in which there is always hope for humanity of a possible redemption. The characters are so skill fully created that each one stands as the embodiment of a type of larger human species while laying bare their original nature out of an unreal settings. Given the somber purpose, symbols and metaphors have been powerful tools to present the oblique truth against plane statement which reverberates within as lasting myth. Major critical responses to William Golding's fiction have been focused to show the commonality of response of Golding critics all over the world as to the visionary acumen of the author who under some critical interrogation named himself a universal pessimist but otherwise; he is a cosmic optimist in core.

The term ontology is taken from the Greek word 'onto' means, being; that which is and 'logia' means, science, study, theory. Thus, it is the philosophical study of the nature of being, existence, or *reality* as such, as well as the basic categories of being and their relations. Ontology as a philosophical concept is a branch of metaphysics which is concerned with the study of being. There are many concepts which are argued within ontology - such as whether existence or expression of existence is the base of being, how objects interact, and the manner in which an object is perceived – which have been debated since the earliest times in philosophy. A subset of ontology is the attempt to categorize all things in existence and the expressions of existence in a taxonomical manner as scientists do with living objects. The obvious problems are that: a) the definition of an object or its expression is tied to its observation, which can vary for different people at different times and places (their

relationship to the object) and b) everyone has their own opinion as to what constitutes a category, or even if categories exist.

When ontology is spoken of it might be confusing with any of the alternatives. On the other hand attempts have been made to analyze and explain the effects of Golding's work by reference to his themes, symbol, metaphor, characters and point of view to base the judgments on his ontological deliberations. Pragmatic view is also not discounted as Golding used certain special techniques such as reversal of point of view, fluctuating symbols and metaphors, uncommon situations and settings, and subverting existing belief system of the so called civilized world.

Baker has clarified Golding's idea on ontology as, 'He must remain intransigent in the face of accepted beliefs and insist upon alternative perspectives, obscure rhythms, beneath the surface of contemporary clichés. Like Forster, he disowns all metaphysical systems and recognized gods' (Baker: 65). Here, begins the journey of this present paper. He has shown a pantheistic belief and insisted on attaining the mythic powers of perception for uniting the trinity of head, heart, and soul so that the whole man is born, who alone could be capable of right faculty of judgment and could avoid any distortions common to limited beings, else:

We remain troubled and incomplete creatures: evolution is slow; history, meanwhile, a tissue of mad charades. Human nature and history are linked, fused in a single shape, while the indifferent cosmos lives on, following its own rhythm, moving in directions we cannot determine and toward ends we cannot understand (Baker: 62-70).

Joceline determined to follow his vision of building a spire defying all physical law what he calls 'Joceline's folly'. He ultimately built it solely on the conviction that God has chosen him despite it was "twining, engulfing, destroying, strangling" (The Spire: 187). It may be argued that he was inspired by Satan, no God, as he defied physical law. Golding leaves the readers to speculate such conundrum which is beyond human knowledge and certainty. Ultimately, Jocelin achieved the miracle which is still standing tall at Salisbury as a diagram of prayer and hence, it mustn't be Satan's. History bears that a miracle is God's domain. But his inspired purpose could not be accomplished without committing sin. The fiction's imagery says that he was immortalized in the cathedral's gargoyles which was bursting "out of the stone like bolls or pimples, purging the body of sickness, ensuring by their self-damnation, the purity of the whole" and still his work is like "growth of a plant with strange flowers and fruit...( The Spire: 62). Thus, Joceline's ontological search is his mythic power of uniting the trinity and God's miracle is right here and right now.

Ontology was revived in the early 20th century giving way to phenomenology and existentialism by Edmund Husserl and his student Martin Heidegger. Phenomenology as a study of ontology is based on a certain interpretation namely, that the phenomenon is not the manifestation of 'something else,' such as essence, but rather that which reveals itself as an object directly presented to consciousness. Thus, Husserl views phenomenology as the intuitive examination of ideal essences, or phenomena that has immediate validity, contending that the experience of truth is self-evident and the contemplation of phenomena self-validating. It emphasizes the immediacy of experience (Dejnozka: 7). The *Double Tongue* (1994) opens with the memory of Arieka, the protagonist's account of the time of her birth in this world which may be argued as her ontological realization as it is her self-validating essences: "Blazing light and warmth, undifferentiated and experiencing themselves. There I've done it! The best I can, that is memory" (Double Tongue: 3). Arieka's memory at the time of her birth is her immediacy of experience.

The author is sharing his experience through Pythia (*Double Tongue*) about the state of 'Being' in the realm of spirit- no shape, no form - only a kind of vibration in timeless presence. Time never glides by; time is an apparent perception. He certainly expresses in connotative words his own ontological experience through his protagonist in the same

breathe: "It was a quality of, a king of naked being without time or sight (despite the blazing light) and nothing preceded it and nothing came after, It is detached from succession, which means, I suppose, it may have happened at any point of time –or out of it" (Double Tongue: 3).

Golding explores moral dilemmas at the center of human existence and he frequently places his characters to face extreme situations to suggest a mythological dimension to their lives. The characters always move around a double view and a basic dialectic of opposing ideologies. Preoccupied with evil and original sin, he treats these subjects in a way that transcends the boundaries of orthodox Christianity. The nature of good and evil, as Golding has presented, is so generalized and panoramic that unravels the question what manner of creature is man? and make man face the sad facts of his own cruelty and lust. Martin in the *Pincher Martin* (1956) had no belief in anything but his own life, no God. The greed for life forced him to refuse the selfless act of dying. He continued to exist separately in a world composed of his own murderous nature. Having drowned, his consciousness still tries desperately to hold on in a watery purgatory.

The theme of *Lord of the Flies* as described by Golding himself is: "An attempt to trace the defects of society back to the defects of human nature. The moral is that the shape of a society must depend on the ethical nature of the individual and not on any political system however apparently logical or respectable." (Lord of the Flies: 250). It is Simon, the Christ figure, who alone among the boys feels the real nature of evil on the island, that it is not external but part of their very selves. But his recognition of evil and all mankind complicity occasions his ritual murder.

An assessment of the *Free Fall* purely on religious sense is to impose a pattern on the essential mystery of things, of Sammy's life. It is already observed that social factors are greatly responsible for Sammy's fall. Sammy's world is torn with the conflicts of: body and spirit, faith and pragmatism, good and evil. But it is after the transfiguring experiences in his prison cell that Sammy as narrator, and we as readers, can look back and fit the pieces of the puzzles together. Golding adds a conviction of essential guilt which renders rational moral purpose of little avail. The climax of the novel is Sammy's responsibility for Beatrice's cataleptic degradation. She is the focus of Sammy's guilt and thence comes his spiritual awareness. At the point of Sammy's falls, we see the gravity of his self-condemnation. He discovers his panopticon himself and confesses, "For this gilt, I found occasion to invent a crime that fitted the punishment. Guilty am I therefore wicked I will be ..." (Free Fall: 232).

*The Lord of the Flies* (1954), rated as a classic in the literature of disillusionment that grew out of the Great War, has been one of the most studied tales in the 20<sup>th</sup> century and continues to be perfect myth that reverberates with what had gone wrong with the humanity and the possible way out. Unlike other political novelist of his time such as Orwell, who upheld the political freedom through *Animal Farm* or *Nineteen Eighty four*, Golding was apolitical, non believer of so called political system, or of present welfare state of solving all the problems. In theological terms, his pessimistic view of humanity's inherent imperfection is familiar as the fall of man. The anthropological details of the tribal-seeming activities of the small boys elicit grief at man's very nature powerfully; the pain and grief that the boys, and we all are "suffering from the terrible disease of being human" (Hot Gates: 87). Like Shakespeare's tragedy, Golding has laid bare human nature, a stripping down of man to what he is. He has placed the boys in an island letting them workout archetypal patterns of human society in which the message of Christianity, the concept of original sin is enacted. Martin is a fallen man whose human consciousness is an evolutionary specialization. Martin refuses the self-less act of dying. He clings to the 'rocall' with his fierce, satanic will, refuses to acknowledge the cosmic chaos of death till he is consumed by the black lightning of god. *Free Fall* is basically on the Fall of Man, the expulsion from paradise. In the title itself two



overriding themes are made clear: Man is doomed by Original Sin, and Fall is a reality. A similar metaphorical structure is built around the erected wit and infected will of Sammy Mount joy while, with a view to discovering a pattern, he journeys through free will in relation to the scientific idea of the unrestrained movement of body under the force of gravity. Sammy is a depraved as any other typical Golding hero as he falls freely under his irresponsible and infected sexual lust.

Sammy Mount-joy wanted to mount in joy but he falls with the question of his being and becoming; Ionides (Double Tongue) ended up being skeptic; the validity of Ralph's cry for loss of innocence is under clouds. Golding's message is that we are neither the innocent nor the wicked; we are the guilty. We fall down, crawl on hands and knees, weep and tear each other, but we can't look at where we began. What are needed are a moral and a spiritual evolution. He has endeavoured to synthesize flesh and spirit as Matty in *Darkness Visible* or Arieka in *Double Tongue* has shown through their illuminating reconciliation that both are not contradictory, but complementary, for Golding yearned for saving the mankind from its temporary eclipse what the Godless world of 20<sup>th</sup> century is plagued with.

The complementarities of this phenomenal world finally fuses into philosophical monism what was realised by Plato in western philosophy who first declared that the world is unreal, god is the real and the entire phenomenal world is His reflection what Vedanta philosophy already declared the same truth much before him. Golding has echoed the same realization in modern times having gone through the vicissitudes of life that we are strangers in this world what he declares through the words of Arieka, "I detected...that all religions were not foolish nor their customs , and that the cosmos which we inhabited was a stranger place than people sometimes thought. We must not take our modern wisdom for granted as a final thing" (Double Tongue: 116).

The search for ontology is a never ending process as the task of a woman never ceases in any family across the world. Oa in *The Inheritors* is the primal mother, Judy died of child birth (SP) and Arieka (DT) was an iconic lady who left all the fragrance of absolute truth amid her life full of action and suffering and it's always satisfying as one has to fulfill his /her duty in this world, else there is no escape. The Phoenician's lady in the *Double Tongue* murmured, "'We women are never free', it's rather nice really" (Double Tongue : 107) and one should go on till Gaia engulfs them who brought forth.

The black lightening engulfed Martin; he is dead, yet he held on to survive in his ego only to obfuscate the ontological truth. He defied God only to enjoy his capricious liberty. Against this backdrop, Sammy in the cell surrendered to God in absolute dark and silence and had his vision of resurrection. The condemned jack, (Lord of the Flies) always in killing spree in an atavistic manner, is also only to liberate himself. The question of freedom what everyone struggles for knowingly or unknowingly is dealt through the omniscient voice,

"Freedom isn't a simple thing because people make theories about it. The thing in itself, to coin a phrase, is not a matter of thought but a matter of feeling. If you are as free as a man can be. But if your feelings won't stretch to a bigger entity, which makes the rules, then you don't feel free. As I see learning, I mean education, knowing what's what if you like, being street-wise –and for all your philosophers, that's what it comes to –is the ability to feel larger entity...that you ought to feel for a larger area, I'll call it Panhellenia!"( Double Tongue : 108).

The term Panhellenia is used in the sense of a vision that accommodates every human being as the author felt genuinely all human being is his kith and kin; all have a common origin from the mother goddess, Gaia. Hence, it is more of a person's ability to feel rather than just speaking in all lifeless lofty terms.

In chapter VI of the *Double Tongue*, Arieka confesses regarding the power and purity one needs to attain the height whence one can speak in elevated terms. Golding deliberately used such elevated terms and left his lofty treatise as he knew certain that in 20<sup>th</sup> century the world is plunged into the myth of progress and in mad pursuit of everything mundane oblivious of the true essence of the world and if the world is too late to realize then damage

could be enormous. Hence, Golding took the task upon himself of waking and answering people into elevation, "I did sometimes give and answer in hexameters though that answer was never easy. It required a certain elevation of the spirit though it caused a greater stir than I was aware of at the time" (Double Tongue: 115).

All mortal souls are bound by the world of differentiations and deficiency. So our vision and judgment have necessarily to be corrupted by de facto human being. Human condition itself is responsible and we are bound to accept it. Golding had no existential dilemma or any absurdity thereof for humankind. His vision is straight and simple as he could speak through the hexameter. It is more important that we need to create a measure for ourselves what justifies our lot. Pythia had her measure that she could pronounce the truth of god and immensely revered. Hence, in the world of binary, we are to make us perfect flutes the compass of which would be used by God to play upon and the finer the compass, sweeter would be its music. Perhaps, Golding made him a perfect flute of whose music charmed the world with a magic to dispel all darkness, though not without any flaws as he was a human being of flesh and blood.

Conclusion: Golding's series of novels hinges upon one basic question and one single answer as his thesis statement that all the differentiations are only on the surface. All the things are necessary to smoothen our own knowledge and experience. We must go through the process slowly yet certainly till we come to realize the truth that there is a unity in everything visible and non visible. This, he called as *Delphic Oracle* or self-knowledge of one unifying power at the back ground of all chaos and differentiation. The world, for him, has been constant. The *Inheritors* does not speak of only of destruction of innocence but it came in author's mind as the beacon of future condition of global terrorism and bizarre incidents of neo colonial competitions arising out of post modernist phenomena to which 21<sup>st</sup> century bears testimony to. Hence, Golding's ontology is a cosmic optimism of reviving the sense of purpose of the mankind amid the apparent chaos of existence.

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